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COACH AND BUS WEEK

CBW

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February 17 2005

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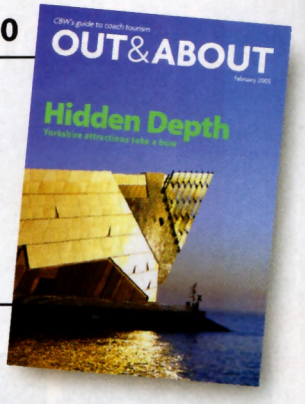

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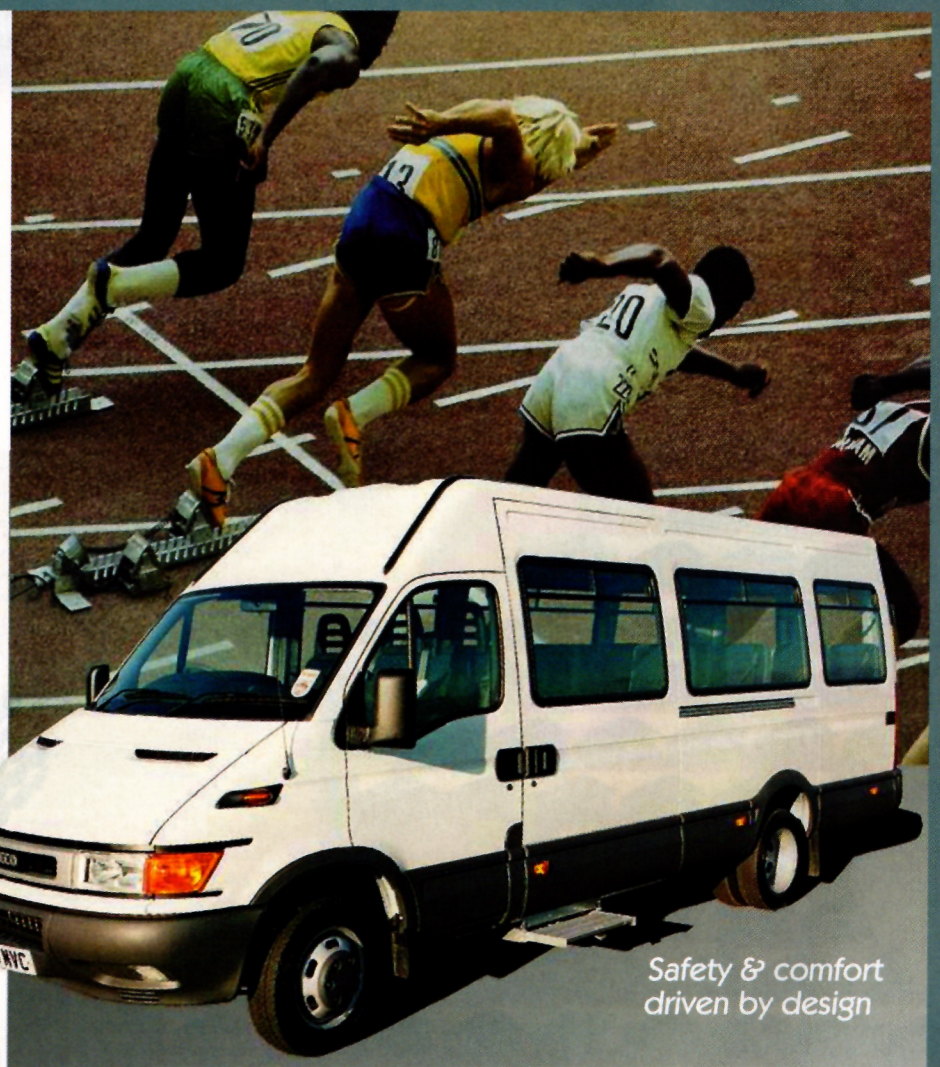

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CBW COACH AND BUS WEEK

For all *CBW* contact names and phone numbers please turn to page 16

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CBW says

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That feeling of déjà vu

DÉJÀ VU is a strange feeling, isn't it?

This week we report on First in Bristol's problems with service operation and how it faced a public inquiry headed by senior traffic commissioner Philip Brown. It could be fined £200,000 for not running 95% of services no more than one minute early or five minutes late - the commissioners' 'window of tolerance'.

I thumbed through my back issues of *CBW*, came upon the January 16 2003 issue and inside was a Licensing & Legal report on... First Bristol up before the senior commissioner for... failing to operate services as registered.

Meanwhile, our reporter, Andy Roden, happened to be interviewing Mr Brown last week, although the senior traffic commissioner, understandably, said he was unable to comment about specific cases. I flicked through the same back issue and there was... an interview with the then newly appointed senior traffic commissioner, Philip Brown - by me. You can read Andy's interview in a forthcoming issue. It should provide an interesting update on the last two years during which Mr Brown has been in the senior commissioner's chair.

In fact, the Public Inquiry we have reported on in this issue is the company's fourth - definitely a case of *déjà vu* and one that has started me thinking.

Firstly, it rather tends to disprove allegations from smaller operators that the 'big boys' tend to get away with it more than the small fry, although, admittedly the fines doled out to the big operators are not necessarily proportionate to those suffered by the small operators.

Secondly, why can't a big operation like First in Bristol get it right? Is it because it really is that bad or is it because, as First in Bristol claims, congestion, roadworks and poor infrastructure make it impossible to stick to the 'window of tolerance' as specified by the commissioners? Admittedly not all First operations are the same but I remember the problems being explained to me during a visit to Leeds by Ian Davies, who was, at the time First UK Bus Yorkshire Divisional Director. I remember thinking at the time: "Thank God I'm not a manager in a big urban bus company. It's a wonder that buses run at all," - and, of course, sometimes they don't.

'Why can't a big operation like First in Bristol get it right?'

No doubt this explains our report (*CBW*, December 23, 2004) that the "six-minute window is set to be relaxed" after a major agreement reached with traffic commissioners, starting from January 1. We said: "A consultation exercise with the commissioners has led the PSV industry's arbiters to review standards set for bus service punctuality." The commissioners' Practice direction No. 4 said: "It is accepted that traffic and other hazards, such as roadworks, can cause short-term problems and commissioners, therefore, accept that a bus may be delayed in these circumstances." Tony DePledge of Arriva, who chaired the committee on the bus partnership forum, told *CBW* it was a good agreement and was "formal recognition of the reality of running bus services in modern traffic conditions."

Obviously, though, it came too late for First in Bristol.

Frank Forster, Deputy Editor

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Coach and bus mergers

ANDY RODEN REPORTER

...as TGM sells its Dartford operation

TELLINGS Golden Miller is selling its Dartford operations to Go-Ahead subsidiary Metrobus.

TGM bought the Dartford operation in August 2003 but says opportunities for expansion have not materialised in the short-term. For its part, Metrobus says it is delighted by the takeover, which strengthens its position in Orpington.

Five routes will transfer to Metrobus, and the company has reached agreement on the transfer of vehicles to operate them. It is also trying to ensure continued employment of TGM staff affected under Transfer of Undertaking rules.

The announcement comes as a new report by Plimsoll Publishing claims acquisition activity in the coach and bus industry is set to rise in 2005. According to the firm, there are 93 cash-rich companies with average margins of 3.1% and little or no debt. It also says there are 78 potential prospects for acquisition, who average margins of -3.1%, and have debt of around 18% of sales.

Plimsoll senior analyst David Pattison says: "These under-pressure companies are running out of options. As the average industry profit margin is only 2% and over half of companies are failing to increase sales, trading their way out of their current position will be almost impossible.

"With so many cash-rich companies operating in the market, selling up might be the only sensible option left. By acquiring and clearing the debts of any one of these struggling companies, a cash-rich company could become the proud owner of a profitable business."

The findings are contained in the *Plimsoll Portfolio Analysis* -

Las Vegas checks out E500

DELEGATES from Las Vegas came to Alexander Dennis' Falkirk factory this week to see how it is testing Enviro500 deckers due for delivery later this year. The first of 50 E500s is expected to enter service on the Las Vegas strip in September.

TPi to assess London transport plan

THE LONDON Borough of Brent has appointed transport consultant TPi to carry out an environmental study of its transport plan.

This is now a requirement under EU legislation (2001/42/EC directive). It covers all plans and programmes developed by local authority and government bodies - now the subject of Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA).

The SSEA will identify aspects of the environment that will be significantly affected by the LIP, test potential alternative strategies to see if they could have a lesser impact and specify measures to mitigate damage.

Arriva hit by fire

ARRIVA is investigating how a TransBus Dart bus caught fire on February 9 in Grays, Essex.

Steve Ferns, operations director of Arriva Southern Counties, said: "We confirm that there was a fire on board one of our buses serving route 383 yesterday in Grays.

"The incident happened at around 1640hrs while the bus was travelling along Orsett Road. The driver safely evacuated the passengers and the fire brigade arrived within ten minutes and extinguished the fire. There were no reported injuries."

First Wyvern takes Enviro300

THE 25th Enviro300 to go into service has been delivered to First Wyvern.

The bus was specially painted in 'heritage' livery to celebrate the 100th anniversary of the Birmingham and Midland Omnibus Company (Midland Red) which was formed in November 1904. A further 13 Enviro300s will be delivered by ADL to First over the next three months.

Coaches not owned by Eirebus

WE recently reported (*CBW*, February 3) that Eirebus is using five new Van Hool Alizée coaches on Citylink's Dublin-Galway service. Eirebus has since informed us that the five coaches are owned and operated by another firm. *CBW* apologises for any inconvenience caused to Eirebus.

Make space for the Guide

DON'T let the *Coach and Bus Guide 2005* with this issue of *CBW* leave your desk - it will become your most valuable handbook.

Listing most of Britain and Ireland's PSV operators, all major vehicle suppliers, and suppliers of everything from air-conditioning to washing systems, the *Coach and Bus Guide* has been revamped to make it even easier to find what you want.

"I've got *CBW* readers to thank for letting us know that last year's index wasn't the easiest to use, and we've made sure that this year's is the simple combination of an alphabetical listing, county by county," said editor Mark Williams.

The Guide has also been redesigned and, for the first time, includes the *Minibus Handbook*. In both sections, we have completely new features - including an EXCLUSIVE explanation of working time under the new Road Transport Directive rules.

"*Coach and Bus Week* is the only magazine to offer its readers, completely free, two leading directories.

"If you bought these separately, they'd cost you £70, making our £69 subscription rate a snip," said Mr Williams.

set to rise in 2005

Bus & Coach Operators, which examines the top 574 companies in the industry. The latest edition includes a free acquisition pack highlighting the under-pressure companies mentioned in the report.

● The 769-page analysis costs £305 in paper format, or in electronic format £499 plus VAT, but *CBW* readers will receive a 5% discount on both - a saving of £25 on the electronic version.

***To order, call 01642 626400, or visit* www.plimsoll.co.uk**

Wallace Arnold/Shearings tie up could be one of many this year

First in Bristol faces £200,000 fine

FIRST Buses in Bristol faced its fourth Public Inquiry last week after 33% of its services failed to run on time.

Traffic commissioner Philip Brown called in the Vehicle and Operator Services Agency (VOSA) to monitor First buses in Bristol after a number of complaints.

Of the 1,231 services surveyed over 28 days, 242 were late, 143 were early and 33 never turned up at all., an average of 14 flawed services per day.

First now faces a fine of up to £200,000.

In November 2002 a Public Inquiry heard that almost one in four bus services run by First in the former Avon area were late when monitored by vehicle inspectors and in October 2000 Mr Brown fined the firm almost £260,000 and ordered 90 vehicles to be taken off the road. However, his ruling was overturned by an appeals tribunal, which said he had not properly taken into account the effects of traffic in Bristol.

First blames traffic congestion, car drivers and poor infrastructure in Bristol for the latest problems. The firm also claims the traffic commissioner's 'six-minute window of tolerance' is "unrealistic." Recently (*CBW*, December 23, 2004) we published a news story saying that "the traditional 'six-minute window' could be relaxed after a major agreement reached with traffic commissioners" from January 1.

For a full report on this case turn to page 12.

● Meanwhile, First has unveiled a £1 million package of five new lowfloor deckers for a Plymouth/South-East Cornwall route.

The new vehicles are part of a joint initiative between First and Plymouth City Council, supported by Cornwall County Council and Caradon District Council.

The Department for Transport awarded Plymouth City Council's transport team £631,750 under the Urban Bus Challenge Fund, with First investing an additional £420,000. The £1m package has replaced a fleet of double-decker buses and mini buses, many of which were more than 20 years old operating from South-East Cornwall through to Plymouth.

The five new deckers, four of which are pictured below, are all route-branded with distinctive colourful livery. They have individual seats and CCTV.

Arriva London manager rewarded by TfL

VINCE Goane, one of Arriva London's general managers, has been rewarded by Transport for London for his outstanding personal contribution to the bus industry.

Vince received an award from London mayor Ken Livingstone in recognition of his 30-year commitment to improving bus services in the capital.

The award was made following nominations by Arriva London MD Mark Yexley and voting by a committee of senior managers at Transport for London.

Vince began his career as a bus driver operating in Enfield in May 1974. Since then, he's held positions as an inspector, a garage inspector, an assistant operating manager, operating manager and now general manager. In this role, Vince has responsibility for around 1,500 employees and works with a team of managers to ensure the efficient service runs properly.

NEWS IN BRIEF

Dunn-Line bid

Dunn-Line is applying for an O-licence in the Eastern Traffic Area to run 30 vehicles. It says it is in talks to buy certain vehicles and premises from a local service and contracted bus operator. With the outcome of negotiations uncertain as *CBW* went to press, a further announcement is expected soon.

Campaign flying high

A cheque for £15,000 has boosted Age Concern's campaign to make community transport more accessible for older people. Pigeon fanciers donated the cash, which will go towards the charity's SeniorMobility campaign, at the annual British Homing World show. The show has raised £236,500 in total for SeniorMobility, helping support 27 community projects in the UK.

Welsh service boost

Arriva North West and Wales has introduced new buses and an improved service linking north and south Wales. The new buses, with low floors and CCTV cameras, will be operated on the Traws Cambria Aberystwyth to Bangor service.

Power to Stop

Officers from the Vehicle and Operator Services Agency (VOSA) have been given the power to do spot-checks on goods and passenger vehicles in Hampshire. The Power to Stop scheme means that road police officers no longer need to be present when vehicles are stopped. Hampshire is the 29th police force area to introduce the scheme.

Minibus driver dies

A 50-year-old minibus driver died in hospital after he was found unconscious at the wheel following a crash on the Isle of Sheppey, in Kent. The man, from Sheerness, in Kent, was taken to Medway Maritime Hospital, where he was pronounced dead.

Parking views sought

Southampton City Council is gauging local people's views on its residential parking scheme. Local people are being invited to voice their opinions on parking zones, permits and general parking issues at a scrutiny panel meeting in March.

Business can't wait

British Travel Trade Fair, 2 – 3 March 2005, Hall 12, NEC, Birmingham, UK

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Setras kick off 2005 for Kerry Coaches

GABRIEL CONWAY CORRESPONDENT

Operator anticipates 'another bumper year'

KILLARNEY-based tour operator Kerry Coaches is looking forward to "another bumper year" and kicked off 2005 with a pair of new Setras from EvoBus UK and a high-specification Mercedes minicoach from Brian Noone.

"We had a great year in 2004, virtually our whole fleet was out on the road every day, and the early indications are that 2005 will be as good or better," Kerry's operations manager Alan O'Connor told *CBW*.

Two Setra S315GTHD have been delivered in the company's own colours, and a third due for delivery later in the year will be in the colours of a major golfing customer. The 49-seat vehicles feature full air-conditioning, twin-monitor DVD system and toilet, and will be used on front-line touring work as part of a fleet of more than 25 coaches, none more than six years old.

The company has also taken delivery of a 27-seater Mercedes 815D with a stylish Wing body, again fully air-conditioned. "We have a number of executive-style minicoaches with higher spec and lower seating capacity for golfing and corporate work, but we needed something comfortable and rugged but with more seats for our walking and hiking tours, and this was just the job," said Mr O-Connor.

Based in purpose-built premises just a mile from the centre of Killarney, Kerry Coaches offers a range of services to tour operators visiting the area, from fuelling and maintenance to secure parking.

New Setras illustrate Kerry Coaches' growing business

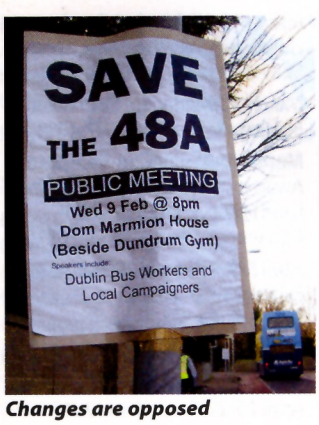
Politicians join fight to save Dublin route

LOCAL politicians including Government chief whip Tom Kitt have backed residents of Dundrum and Ballinteer in south Dublin who are campaigning against the abolition of one of Dublin's longest-established bus services, the 48A, which has operated in the area since 1926.

Semi-state operator Dublin Bus wants to axe the service following the loss of up to 50% of traffic to the new LUAS tramway system (*CBW*, February 3) but local groups fighting the changes say that the bus provides links which the tramway does not, and that the proposed extension of other routes through Ballinteer will reduce choice and give an unwieldy routeing.

More than 300 members of the public turned out at a protest meeting on February 9, despite atrocious weather on the night, and political activists from all parties pledge to fight for the service. A statement issued by local TD and Minister Tom Kitt advised protesters that his office had persuaded the company to reconsider. However, drivers' representatives at the meeting denied this and said that negotiations on changed rosters for the abolition were still continuing.

If the company goes ahead with the decision to abolish the 48A service it could face a legal challenge, as protesters investigate a report of a 1946 court ruling against parent company CIE, which stipulated a minimum service on the 48A from Ballinteer.



Changes are opposed

Powershift grants planned

THE DEPARTMENT for Transport is to present new grant proposals for 2005/06 to the European Commission this month.

It hopes its plans for alignment with European competition and state aid policy will reduce the chance of Powershift funds being unavailable for many months after the end of March.

Under EC state aid rules, the Energy Saving Trust's current Powershift programme could be ruled illegal as it effectively favours some manufacturers over others. No grants will be available after March 31 until the latest Powershift plans are approved by the European Commission.

Grant aid for either Powershift or Clean-Up programmes has become massively oversubscribed for the last two years - causing some businesses to defer spending on new vehicles or cleaning up emissions from older ones. Deferred orders pencilled-in as agreed, relating to vehicles or systems eligible for support funding, will quickly eat up any new allocation promised in March.

Cashback deals on Citroën vans

CITROËN has introduced its largest-ever cashback promotion on light commercial vehicles and extended it until March 31.

Emphasising the strength of the campaign and to highlight some attractive deals, the manufacturer is holding a special 'Citroën National Van Open Week' from February 21-27, involving almost all its UK dealers.

Operators seeking a base platform for minibus conversion can save up to £4,000 plus VAT on Relay models. Relay panel vans and chassis cabs start from just £9,300 + VAT.

Savings of £2,000 + VAT are also available for the smaller, new-look, Dispatch and Berlingo models. C15 vans attract a saving of £1,000 plus VAT and the new C2 Enterprise is down £500 plus VAT.

These deals apply to all vehicles ordered and registered before March 31.

Profits turned around at

MARTIN COLE TECHNICAL & MINIBUS EDITOR

Higher productivity puts firm back in black

ANNUAL returns at Volvo reveal profits for the first time in three years and show its Volvo Buses division achieved sales of 8,232 complete buses and chassis, compared to 7,817 the previous year.

All markets except Mexico and China were stronger. European markets were up 6.0%, Asian markets by 13% and a steep 58% in South America.

Hakan Karlsson, president of Volvo Buses, said: "I'm delighted that customers are increasingly seeing the benefits of Volvo's buses and the wide range of services we offer today in areas such as financing and service. Many of our customers stress the importance of having all their needs met by a single supplier. We will, therefore, continue broadening and developing our complete offer."

Coach and bus sales in 2004 achieved £964.16m against £907.77m in 2003. This left the company with profits of £14.02m. In 2003 the division lost £27.36m.

Hakan Karlsson added: "This turnaround is partly due to greater sales but we have also worked hard to reduce our costs. For instance, we successfully implemented a major restructuring scheme in Europe, which we now plan to implement in other locations around the world."

Restructuring included the closure of Volvo's body factory in Aabenraa, Denmark and moving the production to the factories in Wroclaw, Poland and Saffle, Sweden. The move is said to have improved utilisation of the company's total production capacity. In North America, Volvo acquired full ownership of Prevost Car and its Nova Bus subsidiary, from Henlys Group.

Volvo Buses predicts continued positive growth on the global bus market with a healthy outlook in the US and Canada, South America and Europe. Demand for new buses continues rising in Asia, particularly in India, Singapore and Hong Kong. Low-cost vehicles are on the increase in Chinese markets but demand for expensive buses is declining.

Order books have grown quickly and indicated 4,450 sales at the end of the year - 32% higher than the same time in 2003.

Carlisle's 'amphibious' fleet is written off

EIGHTY-five buses submerged in five feet of water during Carlisle's January floods are being written off by Stagecoach North West at a cost of £2.9 million.

Its depot was also severely damaged in the floods. Vehicles are running from there but equipment, including rolling roads and fume extractors, is taking some time to replace.

Vehicles damaged ranged from in-store Routemasters to a pair of six-month-old Dennis Darts, coaches and minibuses. The vehicles were immersed in water which contained high levels of effluent, adding corrosion to electrical problems.

Stagecoach North West did look into the possibility of repairing the vehicles, but the high cost of this was felt to be disproportionate, and after discussions with insurers, it decided to scrap all the buses involved. Of the 85 buses, 26 were lowfloor, with just two of Carlisle's lowfloor fleet surviving - they were based at Penrith for the weekend.

It is unclear when Stagecoach will replace the vehicles, or what with, although sister companies from around the country have loaned buses temporarily. Among vehicles being used is a 26-year-old Bristol VR and 16 B10Ms from Manchester. Scottish subsidiaries of Stagecoach have donated a mix of B6s and B10s, while other vehicles have come from Hastings, London, Oxford, Newcastle, Sunderland, Darlington and South Wales.

Hard-pressed mechanics now have 12 different vehicle types to maintain but a full service has operated in Carlisle since January 7. The lack of lowfloor buses is bothering some passengers but, faced with 85 vehicles being written off, it's difficult to see what more Stagecoach could do.

Five-feet deep water saw buses damaged beyond reasonable repair

Bus interiors also suffered

EVENTS

February 17: Seminar on the Effect of the DDA on Smaller Transport Operators, Ramada Hotel & Resort, Gloucester. 0161 958 2000

February 18: Seminar on the Effect of the DDA on Smaller Transport Operators, Royal Country Hotel, Reading. 0161 958 2000

February 21: Seminar on the Effect of the DDA on Smaller Transport Operators, Holiday Inn, Edinburgh. 0161 958 2000

February 22: Driving at Work fleet workshop, Hilton Edinburgh Airport Hotel. 01484 559909 *acasper@brake.org.uk*

February 23: Making Transport Choices Locally and Regionally, One Whitehall Place, Westminster. 020 7787 1211

February 24: Affordable Mass Transit, CBI Conference Centre, London. 01224 263134

March 1: Managing Fleet Safety Seminar, Glasgow. 0800 977 4088

March 2-3: British Travel Trade Fair, NEC. *www.britishtraveltradefair.com*

March 8: Delivering Better Bus Transport, Burlington Hotel, New Street, Birmingham. 020 7787 1210

March 8-9: Major Projects and the Environment, One Whitehall Place, Westminster, London. 020 7787 1210

March 8-10: International Forecourt & Fuel Equipment Show, NEC Birmingham. 01293 613400

March 11-13: Coach Tourism Council Conference, Novotel Bristol. 01227 762200

March 15-17: Bonded Coach Holidays Conference, Callela, Spain. *karenh@cpt-uk.org*

March 22: Managing Fleet Safety Seminar, Belfast. 0800 977 4088

March 30-31: London Transport Awards Dinner & Conference, Park Lane Hilton, London and CBI Conference Centre. 01224 263164

April 5-9: Solutrans 2005, Eurexpo Exhibition Center, Lyon. *www.solutrans.fr*

April 16-17: UK Coach Rally, Brighton.

April 25-27: Confederation of

Volvo Buses

Volvo-based buses such as this Wright's vehicle are behind the success

Half-term ferries hit

THE twin woes of high winds and berthing problems at Calais have severely affected ferry crossings from Dover during school half-term.

On Monday, P&O Ferries advised coach operators that it could not take any day trippers until tomorrow, Friday February 18, while SeaFrance said it was asking operators to report for sailings as normal and it would "do its best to get them away with the minimum of delay."

The problems began on the Tuesday of last week when berths at Calais were taken out of action for maintenance or repair. Both P&O Ferries and SeaFrance cancelled day trip business over the weekend in the bid to ease the backlog. The situation was exacerbated on Monday when Force 9 gales forced P&O to suspend sailings for the day, while SeaFrance managed a limited service.

A spokesman for P&O Ferries said that the port authorities at Calais expected the repairs to take two to three weeks. He added that the key to solving the problems lay with one particular berth - number 7 - that failed last week, so operators could expect some continued disruption.

SeaFrance said it was hoping to operate a "near normal" service by the end of the week but was advising operators and drivers to consider using the M2 and A2 instead of the M20 to get to Dover. That was, coaches would avoid being caught up in Operation Stack, whereby police hold freight traffic until space becomes available.

Passenger Transport UK 30th Scottish Annual Conference, Gleneagles Hotel, Auchterader. 0131 272 2150

May 1-7: Confederation of Passenger Transport, Study Tour - Toronto and Montreal. 020 7240 3131

May 10-11: Association of Local Bus Company Managers annual conference, De Vere Belton Woods Hotel, nr Grantham. 01451 870932, e-mail *twwknowles@hotmail.com*

May 18-19: Coach Tourism 2005, Stoneleigh Park, Warks. 020 7973 6671

May 31-June 3: transport logistic 2005, Munich. *www.transport logistic.de*

June 5-9: UITP World Congress and Exhibition, Rome. *http://www.uitp.com/rome2005/*

September 14-15: Passenger Transport Solutions, Olympia, London

October 5-6: Coach & Bus Live 2005, NEC, Birmingham. 0870 224 8617

October 21-26: Busworld, Kortrijk, Belgium. 00 32 51 226060, *info@busworld.org*

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Centrebus and Pulfrey's take on Grantham work

MARTIN COLE TECHNICAL & MINIBUS EDITOR

Services were previously run by MASS Transit

LEICESTER-based Centrebus and Pulfrey's Coaches of Grantham have taken on the bulk of Grantham's service network.

Most of the work is being handled by Centrebus, which has effectively taken over the business previously run by MASS Transit of North Anston. Earlier this year, *CBW* reported Centrebus' interest in the Grantham operations of MASS Transit.

Centrebus has taken on the Tollemache Road (South) depot and a number of vehicles previously operated by MASS. It is running a combination of commercial and subsidised services in the town and providing links with outlying villages.

Key services include the main cross-town service linking Alma Park and the Earlesfield estates via the town centre from Monday to Saturday, weekday services covering the villages of Great Gonerby, Ropsley and Old Somerby, Woolsthorpe-by-Belvoir, Barrowby, Sedgebrook, Bottesford, Bingham and Nottingham.

Schoolday services will be provided covering Foston, Long Bennington and Great Ponton. The company will review its options and discuss with Lincolnshire County Council extra routes requiring subsidy.

Long-established Pulfrey's Coaches, which has been operating in and around Grantham since 1919, has taken over the Barrowby Gate service at a revised hourly frequency from Monday and Saturday - and will operate double deckers. Centrebus deemed this service non-commercial. The company will also run the Sunningdale service running four times daily from Monday to Saturday.

LCC has yet to establish an operator for the subsidised service between Grantham and Bourne, via Corby Glen. It has received bids on this route, but the winner is yet to be decided.

MASS Transit: previously ran business

BD calls for pilot booze tests

BAKERS Dolphin wants airlines to follow its lead by invoking random breath tests on its pilots.

The call was issued after a recent case where a woman pilot working for easyJet was suspended for being four times over the legal limit prior to a scheduled take-off from Berlin.

Just hours before the flight she was found to have blood-alcohol level equivalent to having drunk eight measures of spirits or four beers.

Bakers Dolphin MD Tim Newcombe says his firm carries out random breath tests.

Mr Newcombe said: "This seems to be the only sensible policy for a company which is responsible for the safety of a large number of passengers. I am astonished airlines have to rely on whistle-blowers alerting the authorities instead of carrying out checks themselves.

"I am even more amazed the Civil Aviation Authority regulations ban pilots from drinking alcohol for only eight hours before reporting for duty.

"There have been several cases recently where pilots have been found over the limit and it highlights the need for breath tests to be introduced."

Bakers Dolphin is based in Weston-Super-Mare, employs over 60 drivers and operates a fleet of 76 coaches.

NI deal on the cards

A PARTNERSHIP between private and publicly-owned operators could be the way forward for the road passenger transport market in Northern Ireland.

A delegation from the CPT and the Northern Ireland Independent Coach Operators Association (NIICOA) met Regional Development Minister John Spellar to discuss the market's future at Stormont Castle.

CPT Director General Brian Nimick said: "We wanted to talk to John Spellar about how to grow the market in a controlled way, in partnership with private and publicly-owned operators. I'm pleased to say the minister was enthusiastic about what can be achieved for the Province's travelling public."

'Non' to kids on July 31

FRANCE'S extraordinary 24-hour ban on carrying coachloads of schoolchildren will start this year at midnight on Saturday, July 30.

Once it begins, it is illegal to carry groups of more than 15 children under 16 years old beyond a distance defined by the French Départements' system.

During that day, operators are allowed to carry a group of children only from the Département of origin into a neighbouring Département.

Training adviser appointed

GOSKILLS, the Sector Skills Council (SSC) for passenger transport, has appointed a new adviser to help businesses deliver a first-class service to customers.

The organisation is expanding rapidly, with a number of appointments made recently.

Helen Smith will provide strategic support to businesses in the south east region to help improve skills, learning and training.

Licensing & Legal

First in Bristol faces its fourth public inquiry

Operator could be fined £200,000 after third of services failed to run on time

MARTIN WINTER CORRESPONDENT

Operation

FIRST Buses in Bristol has faced a Public Inquiry after a third of its services failed to run on time.

Traffic commissioner Philip Brown called in the Vehicle and Operator Services Agency (VOSA) to monitor First buses in Bristol after being deluged with complaints.

Of the 1,231 services surveyed over 28 days, 242 were late, 143 were early and 33 never turned up at all. The figures equate to an average of 14 flawed services per day.

Philip Brown: written decision

First, which runs more than 60 routes through the city, now faces a fine of up to £200,000. It is the fourth time the company has been hauled before the commissioner.

In November 2002 a

First in Bristol: inquiries go back over several years

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Public Inquiry heard that almost one in four bus services run by First in the former Avon area were late when monitored by vehicle inspectors. In October 2000 Mr Brown fined the firm almost £260,000 and ordered 90 vehicles to be taken off the road after complaints from the public and concerns over maintenance records. However, his ruling was overturned by an appeals tribunal, which said he had not properly taken into account the effects of traffic in Bristol.

But First blames traffic congestion, car drivers and poor infrastructure for the problems. The firm also claims the commissioner's guideline that 95% of buses should be within the 'six-minute window' is unrealistic.

However, traffic commissioner Mr Brown said that," if the will is there", a solution could be found. He pointed to examples such as Leeds and York, where private vehicles have been banished from the city centre. He said: "If everyone is really serious about finding a solution and, if people are willing to get on and do it, major changes are possible."

First's solicitor, Stephen Kirkbright, said: "The company has tried its utmost to remedy lateness but the problem cannot be solely put on its shoulders. The traffic congestion in Bristol and the lack of facilities in place to allow bus priority hinder the resolution of this problem." First in Bristol MD, Alex Perry, added that, of the 242 buses that were late, 125 of them started their journey on time. "This indicates that the reason they were late was that they were delayed in traffic on the way," he said. However, he gave no reason for the 117 buses that did not start their journey on time and the 33 that never turned up.

Mr Perry did accept full responsibility for the early running of some services and said disciplinary action was being taken against drivers. He said: "Early running is our fault entirely and we need to discipline the staff involved. We do not wish to try to make excuses for this but some drivers worry so much about late running and making the time up that they set off from some stops early.

'Priorities for buses - such as bus lanes - are being abused by car drivers'

"Of course, this is not acceptable." He added: "In terms of late running, the roads in Bristol are congested. One small accident or set of roadworks can delay the service. These small incidents can have a dramatic effect on the service.

"Also, where there is priority for buses - such as bus lanes - it is being abused by car drivers, which causes a huge problem." Mr Perry argued that punctuality would remain an issue for its services unless more money was invested in infrastructure. He called for more routes with bus lanes and traffic flow systems in congested areas. First says the police does not have enough resources to deal with motorists abusing bus lanes. The company has made moves to fund a full-time police officer to enforce bus lane regulations, Mr Perry added.

He said violent incidents on buses further delayed services. "Some drivers have been threatened or assaulted by passengers, which will inevitably delay the service," he added. First has introduced new 'showcase' bus routes in partnership with Bristol City Council to improve punctuality. The 76/77 cross-city routes, connecting the Henbury, Southmead and Hartcliffe areas of the city, were introduced last year and have enjoyed an 11% growth in passenger numbers.

The scheme combines lowfloor, modern buses, improved journey information, designated bus routes and raised kerbs. More bus lanes and a traffic-flow system giving priority to buses at key congestion areas have also been introduced. Bristol City Council invested £3.5 million in new bus lanes, traffic light priorities and bus stops while First ploughed £2.5m into new buses.

What First said

After the Public Inquiry in a statement issued on February 10, First in Bristol MD Alex Perry said:

'First treats any Public Inquiry very seriously. We are committed to providing a safe, reliable and punctual service.

We have made it a priority to ensure that we can demonstrate improved levels of service in Bristol.

- Part of our work has been to ensure we have a sufficient complement of drivers to operate services and cover sickness and holidays. Less than 0.5% of buses in this monitoring exercise failed to operate due to staff shortages
- In addition we have worked closely with Bristol City Council to deliver the first Showcase Route for Bristol (service 76/77) and have committed £18 million to implement a further nine showcase routes for Bristol. We are working with the other unitary authorities, ie, Bath and North East Somerset Council, North Somerset Council and South Gloucestershire Council, to deliver these routes
- On the Showcase Route, where there has been significant investment from First and Bristol City Council, we have seen passenger numbers increase by upwards of 11%
- We undertake ongoing and regular monitoring on all services, to inform the timetable revision process
- In April 2005 we will be paying for a police community support officer to work on public transport issues, particularly enforcement of bus priorities (eg, bus lanes)
- First is developing satellite tracking technology for real-time intervention and historic data gathering, to ensure greater timetable adherence
- We have increased the number of customers using monthly, or annual tickets - which do not require payment on the bus, resulting in improved boarding times

We believe that we have demonstrated that the traffic commissioner's compliance standards for the 'window of tolerance' set at 95% are currently unachievable. Although that does not affect our determination to improve, Bristol's traffic problems make it extremely difficult. The findings of the DfT pilot survey for the Bus Partnership Forum showed a worse national average, with 66% compliance across the UK with the traffic commissioners' 'window of tolerance' standards.

We hope the traffic commissioner will take our evidence into account and make his judgment accordingly.'

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The company argues 'showcase' schemes are the only effective way of delivering punctual services and reducing reliance on cars and has pledged to invest £18 million on 141 buses for nine new showcase routes in Bristol in 2006/07.

But Mr Perry said the firm would only prove successful if the council invested in new bus lanes. He said: "Unless there are more dedicated bus lanes, it will remain a challenge to improve punctuality." The commissioner then cross-examined Mr Perry and his operations manager, Jenny McCloud, regarding information for passengers.

In comparison with other prominent bus firms, First's structure for providing information to passengers was scant at best, the inquiry heard. Waiting passengers have no way of checking whether their bus is en route and how late it will be. Mrs McCloud said the firm was currently piloting a new tracker system. She said: "The new system will allow passengers to ring through to a call centre to check on the progress of the bus. The technology will allow for both real-time intervention and historic data gathering, to ensure greater timetable adherence."

Summing up, solicitor Stephen Kirkbright said: "First believes that, with the changes, it can reach an 85% punctuality result. However, it does not believe it's possible to reach the commissioner's target of 95% due to unavoidable problems which have been outlined in this inquiry. The problems that First faces are in no way confined to Bristol.

"Bus companies face traffic congestion in every city centre in this country." After the inquiry, First released a statement (see separate panel). The traffic commissioner will issue the company with a written decision on the fine it must pay within 28 days.

Other decisions

Eastern

CAMBRIDGE, January 6, 2005
RW Chenery, Diss, Norfolk
Action: Formal warning issued.
The following conditions were imposed under Section 17 of the Act:
(i) Drivers shall be paid primarily on hours taken from tachograph charts
(ii)All tachograph charts shall be subjected to professional analysis, which will be seen, signed and appropriate action taken by the CPC-qualified transport manager.
Two statements of intent volunteered by the operator: Pauline Glenda Garnham will resign as transport manager by January 31 2005 and all drivers will receive an induction assessment and initial training.

CAMBRIDGE, January 5, 2005
A To B Travel Ltd, Luton, Beds
Action: PSV - S17 - No action.

North Eastern

LEEDS, December 8, 2004
Arriva Yorkshire West Ltd
Action: PSV - S17 - Formal warning in respect of prohibitions sustained and failure to comply with undertakings.

LEEDS, December 9, 2004
Station Coaches
Action: S17 - Licence revoked with effect from 2359hrs on January 31 2005.
Schedule 3 - Operator and transport manager found not to be of good repute.

LEEDS, December 15, 2004
Rush Travel Ltd
Action: S17 - Licence revoked with effect from 2359hrs on January 31 2005
Schedule 3 - company found not to be of good repute
S28 - both the company and directors, Margaret Gray and John Rush, have been disqualified with effect from 2359 hours on January 31 2005 for six months.

LEEDS, December 17, 2004
Compass Royston Travel Ltd
Action: Formal warning.

North Western

WIGAN, December 6, 2004
AMC Mini Bus Services
Action: Section 16 - Attach conditions to the licence.

WIGAN, December 13, 2004
Vale Of Llangollen Travel Ltd
Action: S14 - Application granted as applied for condition attached.

South East and Metropolitan

EASTBOURNE, January 5, 2005
Crest Coaches, Bromley, Kent
Action: PSV - S17 - Formal warning issued.
PSV - S28 - No action.

Wales

Merthyr Tydfil, October 5, 2004
2 Travel Group plc
Written decision is:
That the company no longer satisfies the requirement to be of appropriate financial standing and the licence is to be revoked with effect from 2359hrs on January 22 2005 under Section 17(1) of the Act.
(under appeal)

Window of tolerance unrealistic says First

FIRST in Bristol claimed the traffic commissioner's guideline that 95% of buses should run no more than one minute early or five minutes late was unrealistic. However, recently (CBW, December 23, 2004) we published a lead news story saying that "the traditional 'six-minute window' could be relaxed after a major agreement reached with traffic commissioners – and it starts from January 1."

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Come on operators, get your act together

From: Bernard Jefford
Nottingham

In times where a number of coaches are involved and I am in the vicinity I take an obvious interest having spent my working life 'on the platform' in various crew and management positions.

Standards are all too important to me and, where my customers are concerned, they have always come first in my book.

While visiting Peterborough Railway Station on Sunday January 30, 2005, I was aware of the rail replacement operation in full swing and was pleased to see some quality coaches with recent registrations working away. My thoughts were that here were operators recognising the fact that some customers of the railway companies could be riding on a coach maybe for the first time since their schooldays and, having sampled the product, may return at some time in the future to purchase a touring holiday.

What I was not happy to see were those vehicles that were contracted providing buses with bus seats, with a ripped destination board and an unkempt driver. Where are the smart shirts and ties? This was hardly a showpiece for our industry. I am aware of new coach companies starting up and realise that cash is tight. Everyone has to start somewhere and some operators obviously in this position had supplied a P-reg vehicle but they were clean and the driver was smart.

However, what has inspired me to write this missive was the condition of one coach, that had its previous operator's name on the tail and on which the dirt was ingrained. But what shocked me was that one window which was double glazed had the outer pane smashed and jagged edges were apparent (photographs have been supplied). Further along the bodywork the strip had maybe been ripped off and it looked awful.

Imagine now the customer sitting and looking down on to this. What if the coach is involved in an incident on the road with its apparent wrong owner name?

I did not get the chance to see on the inside and can only imagine the condition...

So come on, operators, get your act together when operating contracts, whether they be school trips or rail replacement. You are on display and representing a fine industry.

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Why should we have to put up with this?

From: Anon
Name and address supplied

Further to recent reports and articles about the activities at Traffic Area Offices, in November we telephoned the VOSA TAO requesting an application form for an increase in our vehicle authorisation. Nothing had arrived by mid-December. We rang the TAO again and this time we were asked for our O-licence number and promised the form would be in the post. An application for a 'new O-licence' arrived - going well then...

We rang the TAO and once again explained the problem, provided our O-licence number again and were assured that the correct forms would be dispatched. Three days later a large envelope arrived. "At last!" we exclaimed as we opened it - only to find an application form for 'major changes' to a goods vehicle operator licence. Eight weeks wasted - why on Earth should our industry have to put up with this?

This is what we endure from the very people who seek to impose often unrealistic and increasingly bureaucratic levels of perfection upon us. Do the traffic commissioners understand the way VOSA is undermining their position? They cannot expect any respect from operators when the proverbial wheels are seen by all to be falling off their own administration.

Our industry has to be policed, of course, but, when the majority of those at the sharp end begin to perceive that unanswerable body to have more problems than they do - it does not bode well. Our uplift forms? The additional contracts we have been asked to operate? Don't even ask.

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Money Matters

TOMS: simple in theory

The Tour Operators' Margin Scheme is actually quite complicated, says Martin Pooley (left), but the alternative is actually worse

The background

IN theory the Tour Operators' Margin Scheme is simple.

Suppose you sell two nights in a hotel in Paris for £120 and it cost £100. You pay Customs 17.5%/117.5% of your £20 margin, ie £2.98.

In practice it is complicated but the alternative is worse. Without TOMS you would have to register in every EU country you go to. In the example, if the French VAT rate is the same as the UK rate, you would reclaim £14.89 on the payment to the hotel (the figures are VAT inclusive and £100 x 17.5%/117.5% = £14.89) and you have charged the customer VAT of £17.87 (£120 x 17.5%/117.5%) so you account for the £2.98 difference to Customs. You would pay the same amount as under TOMS but it would be a lot more work.

The technical version is that TOMS:

- Changes the place of supply (VAT speak for which country can collect VAT on the sale) of the bought-in hotel from France, the normal place, to the UK where you are based
- Changes the value of the supply from the selling price to the margin
- Says you can't reclaim VAT paid to the hotel. This makes sense: add the VAT disallowed on the hotel to the TOMS payable on the margin and you get VAT on the selling price

TOMS is governed by EU law, as is all VAT, and it says TOMS is not payable on non-EU destinations. So EU law encourages EU citizens to holiday outside the EU. Do the authorities understand how stupid this is?

The UK has made TOMS a 30-step calculation based on the year-end accounts. The idea is to prevent tour operators arguing about where they make their profits. It does this by requiring you to assume that you make the same percentage profit on all costs. So, if a tour operator has programmes to France and the USA and 60% of the costs are for France and 40% of the costs for the USA, they pay TOMS on 60% of their margin.

It is not feasible to set out a complete example of a 30-step calculation in this article. The principle is as above and, if you want longer examples, go to my website and download my notes and spreadsheets.

When you have worked out the TOMS liability at the year end you compare it with what you paid during the year. You adjust for any under or over payment for last year. You calculate last year's TOMS as a percentage of last year's sales and pay that percentage of sales next year as an estimate of the TOMS payable during the year.

> 'So EU law encourages EU citizens to holiday outside the EU. Do the authorities understand how stupid this is?'

The margin on bought-in transport was not liable to TOMS until the end of 1995 so, if a third of the costs of the programme was bought-in transport, the tour operator paid TOMS on two thirds of the margin. The European Commission said TOMS should be paid on the margin on bought-in transport and took Germany, which was using similar rules, to the European Court of Justice. Germany lost and the UK had to change its rules but a solution was invented (the transport company scheme). However, readers are likely to have their own coaches so they do not need a transport company and I shall not go into it in any more detail.

Inhouse supplies

TOMS applies when you buy in transport or accommodation and resell it. If, instead of buying it in, you own the means of production, it is called an in-house supply and normal VAT principles apply.

So, if you use your own coaches, you're supplying zero-rated transport as well as hotel accommodation. Customs' approach uses the costs shown by the year-end accounts plus mileage records to work out how much you have made on the hotels, etc. It gets more complicated and, by the time Customs has finished, it says you have made 20% or 30% on the cost of the hotels and any admissions, etc. You know you do not make much, if anything, on the hotels. You make money on a tour if you fill the coach, not by filling hotel rooms. There are two fallacies in applying Customs' cost plus approach to in-house supplies.

First, economics tells us that risk and reward are related. You finance and insure coaches, pay for premises, pay drivers and incur many fixed costs before you can put a single passenger on to the road. These costs do not stop just because it is your low season or you have not managed to sell your holidays whereas, if you do not sell enough places on a tour, you can cancel it and you will not pay the hotels anything. There is very little risk on the hotel. So ➤

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TOMS changes place of supply of bought-in hotel from France, the normal place, to the UK

why should you assume you make the same percentage margin on both?

Second, Customs tries to disallow a lot of the costs of running coaches. It is consistent to disallow overheads (because you can reclaim the VAT on them instead - unlike the VAT on the French hotel in the example) but Customs goes much further. If one of your competitors buys their coaching from someone else, their supplier will price in all their overheads and allow for the cost of finance and profit. All this will be zero-rated.

Fortunately the European Court of Justice is not convinced by Customs' method and said you can use market value for in-house supplies instead of cost (the Howden Court Hotel case). Six years later, Customs is pretending nothing happened but you should be paying less. Unfortunately the market value method is unclear. It may become clearer after the decision in the next test case in the ECJ (MyTravel). MyTravel is, of course, a different kettle of fish from a coach operator but it has its own airplanes so it, too, wants to put a sensible value on the in-house supplies. The decision should be known any day.

Meanwhile, here's one suggestion. You sell a holiday in Paris for £169 per person, including local pick ups. You pay the hotel £100 per person which leaves £69 for the coaching and pick up. You find out what Eurolines would have charged to Paris and you estimate what it would cost to buy in the local pick ups if you do them yourself. Total these costs and you probably find that they come to more than £69. In that case, all your margin was on the transport and no TOMS is due. Do a representative sample from your programme and, if the pattern is clear, so is your TOMS liability.

What do you do next? Start paying less and ask Customs for a repayment. There is a three-year time limit on repayment claims so the sooner you ask the further back you can go. Customs will refuse and you will have to appeal and queue the appeal behind MyTravel.

Other coaching sector problems

Apart from in-house supplies, coach operators have particular problems in three areas of TOMS: mileage records, day trips and overseas VAT. Suppose you use your coaches for a mixture of tours and private hire. The private hire is zero-rated for VAT purposes. Customs wants you to do your TOMS calculation on the profit-and-loss account of the touring activities alone so it wants you to strip out the private hire. You should be able to tell the private-hire income. The difficulty is the cost of the private hire. Customs says you should calculate the cost of all coaching and use mileages to apportion it between private hire and tours. This is not as easy as it sounds.

Day trips may consist of your in-house coaching and a ticket to an attraction. Most tour operators have included day trips in TOMS, which is not unreasonable. In effect the average margin is being applied to calculate the selling price of the tickets.

If this method is good enough for hotels it is good enough for tickets but customs is increasingly often saying that day trips are not in TOMS because you are not buying in any transport (it is your own) or accommodation (or an excursion or a tour guide). Instead it says you must use normal VAT rules for day trips. That means splitting the selling price between the transport (zero-rated) and the ticket (standard-rated). How are you going to do that?

Overseas VAT can be a problem for coach operators. The UK zero-rates most transport but other countries can tax it and Germany, for example, taxes coaching. The Germans want to know how far you have travelled in Germany and you pay them some VAT. This is not TOMS. It is normal German VAT. They have tightened up recently and are demanding coaches carry a copy of your certificate of VAT registration or face delay or even seizure. It is not known whether this is the responsibility of the tour operator or of the coach operator (they may be different) but the travellers are going to be angry either way.

If a tour operator has programmes to France and to the USA and 60% of the costs are for France and 40% of the costs are for the USA, they pay TOMS on 60% of their margin

Day trips may consist of your in-house coaching and a ticket to an attraction

I find a lot of tour operators are paying too much. Are you? Send your last three years' accounts and TOMS calculations and I shall comment with no commitment. If you are paying too much I shall probably offer to deal with the repayment claim for 25% of the repayment. No repayment, no fee.

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Money Matters

Cover for injury or illness

A threat to your health is a threat to your wealth. Insurance expert Peter Willis prescribes some preventive medicine

CAN'T work? Won't earn. The threat of losing your income if you're too ill to work is all too real for the self-employed, contractors, sole traders and partners.

The good news is that there are several forms of insurance cover designed to protect yourself, your family, even your business in the event of illness. As usual with insurance products, the jargon is far from self-explanatory.

Ignore, for a moment, the various insurance products with words like 'health, sickness, illness or medical' in their names. What you are actually looking for in the first instance is to protect your income. You have bills to pay, mouths to feed, and if you are off work, they will still want to be paid, and fed.

The two are Permanent Health Insurance (PHI), and Accident, Sickness and Unemployment Insurance (ASU).

- ASU - it's ASU which gets the compare-quotes treatment, chiefly because it's simpler, and usually cheaper than PHI. The difference is that ASU pays out only for a limited period - up to 12 or 24 months - whereas PHI, as its name is meant to imply, will pay out as long as the incapacity lasts, or until the date you've chosen for cover to terminate, usually at retirement - whichever is the earlier.

ASU tends to be favoured by building contractors and others in work where there is a risk of being put out of action through physical injury. Because of this, and the limit on benefit, the premiums tend not to be age-related. A 40-year-old man might expect to be quoted a £50-60 monhly premium and the figure, from any given insurer, will be much the same for all people from 30 to 50.

- PHI - with PHI, the cover is more individually-tailored, and a good deal more complicated. The premiums are age-related. The younger you are when you start the policy, the lower they will be. They may stay at the same level throughout the policy, but that will depend on the type of rate offered.

There are three rates: guaranteed, which are fixed (except perhaps for inflation) at the start; reviewable, where the insurer can periodically adjust its across-the-board rates in the light of its general claims experience; and renewable, where the premium is held for a fixed period, at the end of which you have the option to renew, at the rate in force for your age at the time. Guaranteed rates are likely to be the most expensive to begin with, but are likely to prove the best value in the long run.

There are many other variables to take into account. One is the deferment period - the gap between falling ill and the start of benefit payments. This can be as little as four weeks, but three months - the most popular choice - is a lot cheaper, and six months cheaper still.

Even more important is the 'definition of incapacity'. In effect, you have a choice of insuring against being unable to follow your own occupation, 'any suited occupation' or any occupation at all. Needless to say, 'own occupation' is the most expensive, but generally worth it.

Your premium level will also be affected by the risk-level of the work you do, and by your gender - women are statistically more likely to claim.

The good news is, in working out your cover, you will not need to insure all your present salary - benefits are tax-free, and available state benefits need to be taken into consideration. Insurers limit cover to a proportion of earnings - typically 60%. This can mean, with inflation-proofed schemes that your cover creeps ahead of your income, and you end up over-insured.

'What you are looking for is to protect your income'

- Critical Illness insurance - while useful, this should not be regarded as an alternative form of income protection insurance. It pays out a lump sum if you go down with one of a specific list of diseases or serious conditions.

Normally, people will take out Critical Illness to cover specific commitments, such as an outstanding mortgage.

- Key man (or key person) insurance - this is a somewhat different matter, in that the person insured is likely to be only an indirect beneficiary of the insurance, or possibly not a beneficiary at all. The purpose of key person insurance is to protect the business against the loss of a key person's services through death or illness.

People in active lines of work can risk being put out of action through physical injury

In the case of a partnership, it is quite common for each partner to hold key person insurance on the other, to enable the business to buy out the interests of a sick or deceased partner and carry on.

The level of cover needs to include not only the value of the contribution which would be lost, but also an allowance or the cost of recruiting a replacement, any lag before that replacement becomes fully effective, and any effect on loans and credit. It can be hard to estimate, but a rule of thumb is five to ten times the individual's remuneration.

Tax relief may be available on premiums, though this will mean the benefits will be taxed, and the value needed will have to be calculated accordingly.

- Life insurance - covering a fixed term, this is the standard product, but critical illness can have an identical, devastating effect on a business nd this type of cover is increasingly being included in critical illness cover.

All of these products are quite complex, and while information, sample quotes and maybe introductions are available on the Internet, don't sign up too quickly...

Spending to save

Paying extra for vehicle cleaning may make sound sense, says one of the country's top operators

Refurb can even make an old stager shine, as proved by this vehicle.

IT MAY be a tradition that drivers clean their vehicles but, at Epsom Coaches, the break with tradition has been welcomed by everyone - including the accountant.

When the coaches arrive back at depot, the drivers clock off and go home, while an army of cleaners climb aboard and get the job done. There are three logical reasons why Epsom does this: cleaners are cheaper per hour than drivers; after a long day at the wheel - or at the start - the last thing drivers want is to have to change clothes to clean a coach; and the state of the coach when another driver takes it over next morning is so often the cause of conflict between drivers.

Now there's one other reason why operators should look closely at getting the cleaners in..the new working time rules. Over a week, the cleaning routine may be more than five hours per coach. When the Working Time Directive bites, operators should be asking themselves whether they want 43 hours' driving from their drivers or the full 48 hours.

The wage bill argument is simple. Why pay a coach driver £7 an hour, plus NIC and other employment costs, for work which can be sub-contracted for £6 an hour? Professional cleaning companies make it their business to stock powerful products which can deal with everything from chewing gum to spray paint.

Even in the workshop, there may be a case for bringing in the cleaners, though the issues are different. Drivers don't create the mess on vehicles but you could argue that fitters who have to clean up their own mess will be less inclined to make a mess in the first place.

Epsom uses Croydon-based Nationwide Cleaning & Support, not only to clean the vehicles but to service the washrooms, replenish the coach loos, and top up water tanks: "I must say they are first class," said operations director Steve Whiteway.

"For example, they sanitise the water tanks - something few operators ever do. When they've finished cleaning a vehicle, they hang a card on the mirror which the driver can use to comment on the standard of cleaning."

Take a long look at your cleaning - you may find that taking on a cleaning firm will, in the long run, not only save you money but create a better working environment for your core workers, your drivers.

Steve Whiteway: clean image for drivers

Licking old vehicles into shape

THE extent to which coaches and buses can be rebuilt is almost unlimited, from retrimming the seats to straightening the chassis.

Coaches with a 'timeless' appeal - those which, generally, didn't attempt to be too stylish - may well be worth a radical makeover if money's tight. In particular, vehicles with low mileage or new engines can be treated to eke another ten years from them.

You have to 'think passenger' to see what needs to be done. A flawless interior is probably the starting point, as this is where your punters will spend most of their time. Changing moquette for modern fabrics and re-lining the luggage racks and centre panel will transform the travelling experience.

You may even consider replacing the seats themselves - expensive, but it is very often the style of seat that gives away a vehicle's age. In the cab, repainting the gear lever and replacing the radio, fitting a new sun blind and going over the dash plastic with specialised polishes can make a world of difference.

Glass deteriorates with age, the surface getting crazed and holding moisture. Firms like Reglaze of Halifax specialise in glass refurbishments on PSVs.

Outside, you can get really radical and, on some coach models, fit a new, later style of front. Repanelling will eliminate the ripples caused by age and make a good paint job really effective, and it isn't as expensive as you might think.

Take a good look at body trim and rear light clusters for cheap ways to lift the vehicle's appearance. Consider new wheel trims, or even alloy wheels as worthwhile investments - particularly as you can remove them when you move the coach on to a new owner.

And if anything rattles, don't ignore it. More than anything else, the smooth, quiet ride is something your passengers will appreciate. If that means lining the engine bay with sound-proofing fabric, it's money well spent.

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Fleet *upgrades*

Moffat switches from deckers

Volvo Coach Sales

TWO Plaxton Profiles are allowing Moffat & Williamson of Gauldry, Fife, to replace double-deckers used on school contracts.

The 70-seaters are based on Volvo's successful B&R chassis and have allowed the firm to trim its once-extensive fleet of deckers to just four vehicles.

Director Iain Williamson said: "I am delighted with Plaxton. The Profiles are ideal for schools work and the 70-seaters have three-point seatbelts, digital CCTV camera surveillance, a reversing camera, and are Disability Discrimination Act compliant.

"They bring a new standard of quality to work which needs high-capacity vehicles and their security and safety features are appreciated by schools and by parents."

As well as 57- and 70-seat Profiles, Moffat & Williamson has taken delivery of Beavers, Cheetahs and a top-specification Panther B12B.

Another operator taking delivery of Profiles is Woodstones Coaches of Kidderminster, whose latest two vehicles mean its entire fleet is less than two years old.

Its Profiles are DDA-specification 53/57 seaters and join two that arrived in January 2004 and two 70-seaters delivered in spring 2003.

Woodstones director Richard Meredith reckons the Profiles are ideal for his business: "We've carved out a niche in the market. We decided to standardise on vehicles that would offer both high carrying capacity and comfort, with our focus primarily on UK operations.

"The 70-seaters are clearly popular with schools and the other coaches can be configured as 53-seaters for longer distance trips, or with 57 seats where carrying capacity is important."

The coaches all have automatic transmissions, and were supplied by Volvo Coach Sales.

Lowfloor Sprinters join Tellings firm

EvoBus UK

TWO lowfloor Sprinters are joining Tellings Golden Miller subsidiary Classic Coaches' fleet of four to run on new 'U Call' services in the Sunderland Coalfields area.

The new services operate around Hetton-le-Hole near Sunderland and have been funded through the Government's Rural Bus Challenge.

Both vehicles operate 16 hours a day, offering a mix of timetabled and demand-responsive services.

They operate in areas with narrow roads not accessible to conventional buses, and registered users can pre-book journeys. Booking information is shown on a data terminal alongside the driver, and other passengers can board the bus at any point on its route.

Classic Coaches MD Ian Shipley said: "The contract required a small bus able to carry wheelchair passengers and, with our experience of the lowfloor Sprinter, it was the obvious choice.

"It provides roll-on access for wheelchairs and is a reliable and proven product with good local backup when we need it."

The new 13-seaters have automatic transmissions and are painted in U Call livery.

Pronto quartet has demanding and versatile role in London

Plaxton

FOUR Plaxton Pronto minibuses are in service with the London Borough of Havering, working on a demanding set of roles.

They work on special education needs and social services duties, as well as community bus services linking Harold Hill, Harold Wood and Collier Row. The vehicles seat 16 with three-point seatbelts and an NMI quick-release system that simplifies the job of removing or refitting seats. Passengers in wheelchairs board through wide double doors at the rear using a Ratcliff tail-lift.

Climate control is fitted, as is a GPS vehicle location system.

Says Havering's transport commissioning unit manager Allen Burbridge: "The safety, security and comfort of the people who use our services are our top priority. With the Prontos we are moving away from ambulance-type buses to vehicles which offer a better travel experience and greater dignity for those who travel with us." The community bus route fills gaps in the main network and carries 20,000 people per year.

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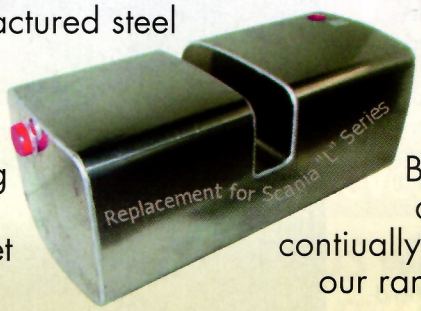

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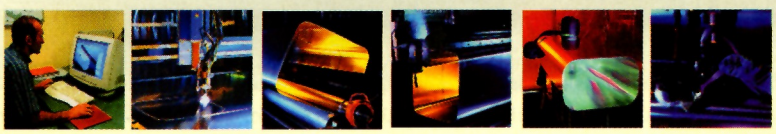

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What's new

New Dealer Point in Essex

VOLVO DEALER Group MC Truck & Bus has opened a new 'Dealer Point' in Witham, Essex, providing repair and maintenance cover for all makes of coaches, buses, trucks, and trailers.

The new facility is conveniently located just off the A12 trunk road between London and East Anglia. It is the first Volvo Dealership in the area and provides cover for customers located between the MC Truck & Bus depot in Thurrock and the Volvo Truck & Bus (South) depot in Ipswich.

The new depot has four purpose-built workshop bays, a full-length inspection pit with rolling-road brake test equipment, headlight beam setter, smoke test and full MOT preparation facilities. A driver's waiting room is provided and there is a fully stocked parts department offering Volvo Genuine Parts and consumables.

MC Truck & Bus now operates eight Volvo Dealer Points across the South and South East.

● ***Details: MC Truck & Bus Limited, Unit 20, Swanvale Estate, Newlands Street, Colchester Road, Witham, Essex CM8 3DH, tel 01376 520727, fax 01376 532299. The premises are open from 0600-2200hrs Monday to Friday and 0600-1400 hrs on Saturday.***

Volkswagen CV Finance offers fixed cost

VOLKSWAGEN Commercial Vehicles Finance is currently offering a number of fixed cost maintenance packages.

They are available to two customer groups: Retail covers sole traders and small businesses running no more than ten vehicles; while Fleet covers small to medium-sized businesses operating more than ten vehicles. The maximum contract period for Retail customers is 48 months and up to 120,000 miles. The Fleet option can provide cover for up to 200,000 miles over a 60-month period.

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The company says Fixed Cost Maintenance offers customers a straightforward way to control the cost of maintaining their vehicles, whether they operate just one vehicle or one hundred.

● ***Details on 0800 717131 or visit www.volkswagen-vans.co.uk***

Signature Aromas sweeten West Midlands travel experience

WEST MIDLANDS Passenger Transport is sweetening the travel experience for passengers by working with Signature Aromas and installing natural oil air freshener systems aboard coaches and buses.

Travel West Midlands has already installed Vaparoma systems aboard 12 private-hire coaches and 50 of its buses. Due to the success of the project, WMPT is now planning to install similar units on seven new buses designated to the 997 Premier Bus service - offering limited stops between Aldridge, Walsall and Birmingham. These units all use the 'Ocean' scent.

Les Bowker from TWM's Walsall depot, said: "The units are ideal as they are unobtrusive but extremely effective, giving the buses a fresh and pleasant aroma - which can only be a good thing for passengers and staff on board. We needed a mechanism that could be safeguarded against vandalism and yet fulfils our high safety specification. Signature Aromas came up with the perfect solution."

Signature MD Brian Chappell added: "WMPT was keen to use COSHH approved natural oils as opposed to artificial chemical products."

Signature Aromas offers a range of 42 different fragrances and the Vaparoma units can either be battery or mains powered and are suitable for scenting areas from 1,000 to 10,000 cu ft without aerosols or chemicals.

● ***Details and demo from Brian Chappell on 01902 678822.***

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5 speed, PAS, long wheel base, high roof, 13 or 8 high back seats plus 2 to 4 wheel chairs, Unwin tracking, Ricon tail lift side loading door low entry, ex authority only 25,000 miles ,

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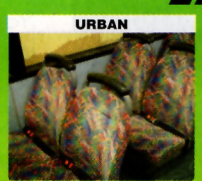

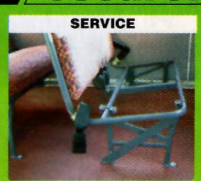

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HAMPSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL

ENVIRONMENT DEPARTMENT

SELECT TENDER LIST FOR DEMAND RESPONSIVE TRANSPORT SERVICES IN ROMSEY AND FORDINGBRIDGE, HAMPSHIRE

The County Council is inviting tenders from suitably registered companies for the above bus services. Details of the tender are given below and the companies complying with paragraph 4 should obtain and return their tenders by the date in paragraph 6.

1. **Name, address, telephone number and fax number of the contracting local authority.**

   Hampshire County Council, Director of Environment, The Castle, Winchester SO23 8UD. Tel: 01962 846988. Fax: 01962 845855. Email: tina.godfrey@hants.gov.uk

2. **Details of the work.**

   Provision of Demand Responsive Transport Services in the Romsey and Fordingbridge areas of Hampshire from 4 July 2005 to 3 July 2006 with the option to extend by blocks of one or two years up to a maximum of five years.

   Each service will be tendered individually although tenderers will have the opportunity to submit alternative tenders to the service detail issues, provided that they generally comply with the specification set down by Hampshire County Council.

   Approximately 56 bus operators will be invited to tender.

   The estimated value of the contract is £160,000 per annum.

3. **Where applicable, the legal form to be assumed by the grouping of service providers winning the contract.**

   Joint and several liability.

4. **Criteria for obtaining contract documents.**

   Certificate of Registration issued by the relevant Traffic Commissioner. Services must be provided under the terms of the 1985 Transport Act and can only be created by companies complying with the legal and operational requirements of the relevant Traffic Commissioner.

   A deed of guarantee may be required at award stage.

5. **Criteria for the award of the contract.**

   The most economically advantageous tender in terms of price and previous operational record. The County Council is not bound to accept the lowest or any tender. The basis for comparison of tenders will be to secure the required service by means of the most cost-effective and economic use of funds available to the County Council. Consideration will also be given to the fares and quality standards offered.

6. **Other Information.**

   Tenders can be obtained from the address in paragraph 1.

   Final date for receipt of tenders is 2.00pm on 8 March 2005.

   The tenders will be opened by authorised officers of The Chief Executive's Department and should be valid for 60 days.

Hampshire County Council

9806/TEN

HAMPSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL

ENVIRONMENT DEPARTMENT

SELECT TENDER LIST FOR DEMAND RESPONSIVE TRANSPORT SERVICES IN ANDOVER AND NORTH WEST AREAS OF HAMPSHIRE

The County Council is inviting tenders from suitably registered companies for the above bus services. Details of the tender are given below and the companies complying with paragraph 4 should obtain and return their tenders by the date in paragraph 6.

1. **Name, address, telephone number and fax number of the contracting local authority.**

   Hampshire County Council, Director of Environment, The Castle, Winchester SO23 8UD. Tel: 01962 846988. Fax: 01962 845855. Email: tina.godfrey@hants.gov.uk

2. **Details of the work.**

   Provision of Local Bus Services (stage carriage) and school bus services in the Andover and North West areas of Hampshire from 29 May 2005 to 30 May 2009.

   Each service will be tendered individually although tenderers will have the opportunity to submit alternative tenders to the service detail issues, provided that they generally comply with the specification set down by Hampshire County Council.

   Approximately 37 bus operators will be invited to tender.

   The estimated value of the contract is £500,000.

3. **Where applicable, the legal form to be assumed by the grouping of service providers winning the contract.**

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4. **Criteria for obtaining contract documents.**

   Certificate of Registration issued by the relevant Traffic Commissioner. Services must be provided under the terms of the 1985 Transport Act and can only be created by companies complying with the legal and operational requirements of the relevant Traffic Commissioner.

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6. **Other Information.**

   Tenders can be obtained from the address in paragraph 1.

   Final date for receipt of tenders is 2.00pm on 29 March 2005.

   The tenders will be opened by authorised officers of The Chief Executive's Department and should be valid for 60 days.

Hampshire County Council

9807/TEN

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49 RECLINERS A/C, CENTRE TOILET,
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MOT NOV 05

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NEW MOT

1995 'M'
SCANIA IRIZAR,
K113 TRI-AXLE,
49 LUXURY RECLINERS, A/C,
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MOT NOV 05

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NEW MOT

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